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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001625

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CACEN

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SUBJECT: HOLD THE PRESSES: TURKISH SCHOLAR RETURNS TO U.S.
READY TO TALK

REF: YEREVAN 1479

Classified By: Ambassador John M. Evans for 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Yektan Turkyilmaz, the Turkish citizen and Duke University doctoral student arrested for attempting to smuggle controlled books and manuscripts out of Armenia (reftel), departed Yerevan for his home in Durham, North Carolina on September 2. Despite claims in court to the contrary, Turkyilmaz told us that he was aware of the export prohibitions on the books he purchased, and that he had attempted to bribe airport employees (as he claimed he typically did during previous visits). The Yerevan court that convicted Turkyilmaz returned volumes of confiscated research materials and kept all but the modern books and manuscripts. Pleased with his release and with Embassy Yerevan assistance, Turkyilmaz said he nonetheless planned to "discuss publicly" the "human rights abuses" he claims he suffered and witnessed during his incarceration. Turkyilmaz said prison guards never physically abused him, but that he witnessed interrogators "systematically beating and raping" other prisoners. End Summary.

TURKISH SCHOLAR ADMITS GUILT, PLEASED WITH OUTCOME

2. (C) In meetings with us after his release from the Armenian National Security Service (NSS) detention center, Yektan Turkyilmaz said he came to Armenia to buy books for his collection as he had done "many, many times before." Turkyilmaz admitted to us he was aware of the export prohibitions on the books he purchased, and that he had attempted to bribe airport employees (a standard procedure, he explained, during each of his previous visits). In a slideshow he displayed for us on his returned laptop, Turkyilmaz proudly reviewed pictures of his personal collection of more than ten thousand antique Armenian-, Ottoman Turkish-, and Kurdish-language books, many of which he said he had purchased in, and already illegally transported from, Armenia. Though the court confiscated eighty-eight of his recent purchases, Turkyilmaz had digitally copied parts from each of the books important to his research along with thousands of pages of documents from the Armenian National Archives. The court returned his research materials, digital and computer equipment, and cell phone.

INTERROGATORS ALLEGE SPYING, NOT SMUGGLING

3. (C) Turkyilmaz said prison guards never physically abused him, but that "KGB" interrogators tried to intimidate him into admitting that he was spying for the U.S. or Turkey. Turkyilmaz claimed that within the first 72 hours following his arrest, interrogators prohibited him from placing phone calls, appointed an attorney who forcefully encouraged him to sign a statement admitting his guilt, shouted derogatory ethnic slurs, and threatened physical harm. The interrogation turned to questioning about the books only after "days and days" of assertions and denials about his "true motives," Turkyilmaz claimed. At one point, according to Turkyilmaz, his NSS interrogators claimed they were members of ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) "the group that assassinated Turkish diplomats in the 70s and 80s." "Do you know who we are? Do you know what we do to Turks?" he quoted them as saying.

SCHOLAR ALLEGES PRISONER ABUSE, HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

4. (C) Turkyilmaz claimed to "know for sure" that NSS interrogators are systematically beating prisoners at the Yerevan detention center. He drew a diagram of his cell (Number 28), and a small port window where he claimed he witnessed officers escorting or dragging talking or screaming "Russian women" to showers, where they either resisted, or

sometimes engaged without resistance, in sex. Turkyilmaz estimated the detention center holds approximately 50 male and female Armenian, Russian and Kurdish prisoners. He asserted he heard "awful screams," and saw people who NSS officers had "beaten horribly." Guards allowed some inmates to "destroy" other prisoners as they stood by without interfering, he claimed. Interrogators periodically escorted his own cell mates "Ara Bostanciyan," "Ardavst Ghazaryan," and "Artur Sarkisyan" upstairs where Turkyilmaz claimed he could also hear them scream. They returned "black, blue, and bleeding," he claimed. "Many of the prisoners were either systematically beaten or raped."

COMMENT: TURKYILMAZ READY TO RAISE ISSUES WITH PRESS

15. (C) Turkyilmaz's Duke University advisor Orin Starn, who attended the court hearings, told us that he advised Turkyilmaz to avoid negative press statements until safely out of Armenia. As he prepared to depart, Turkyilmaz told us that he looked forward to the opportunity to speak to the press freely and openly about his ordeal, and speculated that comments critical of the Armenian Government would help him smooth over relations with Turkish authorities. Turkyilmaz, a Kurd who speaks Armenian and has acknowledged the events of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire as "genocide," predicted he will have legal difficulties when he returns to Turkey, and asserted to us that Turkish authorities have already contacted his family to inquire about his anticipated date of return.

16. (C) Turkyilmaz told us he had been arrested in Turkey for participating in student demonstrations, but declined to give further details. He avoided answering questions about his U.S. student visa application, in which we suspect he did not acknowledge the prior arrest.

EVANS